



HESCHEL AS PHILOSOPHER: PHENOMENOLOGY AND THE RHETORIC OF REVELATION

When evaluating Abraham Joshua Heschel as a philosopher, we should respect his self-definitions and not reproach him for what he does not claim to accomplish.¹ The opening chapters of *Man Is Not Alone* and *God in Search of Man* define his philosophy of religion as “situational,” involving the total person, and its design of transforming our very consciousness of reality:

Thus, the certainty of the realness of God does not come about as a corollary of logical premises, as a leap from the realm of logic to the realm of ontology, from an assumption to a fact. It is, on the contrary, a transition from an immediate awareness to a definite assurance, from being overwhelmed by the presence of God to an awareness of His existence. What we attempt in the act of reflection is to raise that preconceptual awareness to the level of understanding.²

We recognize Heschel's philosophy of religion as a phenomenology, a mode of systematic reflection on consciousness which leads to intuitive cognition. He coins the term “depth theology” to distinguish his combination of pragmatic and theoretical intent as he helps readers to integrate ineffable insights into a lifelong process of validating the divine.

The vehicle of this religious epistemology is what I call “phenomenological writing,” a creative process manifested in a plurivocal expository style that combines critical analysis and literary methods—appealing to both rational and intuitive faculties.³ This discourse fulfills contradictory tasks: it “deconceptualizes” theology in order to foster insights beyond language. Critical dialectics expose gaps between received ideas and the ineffable; at the same time, Heschel reconceptualizes such insights in order to participate in sacred tradition. Heschel thus maneuvers the reading process itself to effect the transition from concepts to an encounter with the divine presence.

The strength of Heschel's procedure is also its basic handicap: the assumption that all human beings have at least once in their lives experienced the momentous reality of God—and have forgotten it.⁴ That “fact” can be proven, he contends, only by re-experiencing revelation.

Heschel's style is more than rhetoric, or the persuasion of an audience, it is *writing*: the dynamic act of putting words to paper itself constitutes critical and inventive thinking. Using Natalie Depraz's analyses,⁵ we characterize phenomenological writing as, first, verbal creation in close proximity to things in the world, bending syntax to the demands of temporal reality without surrendering the awareness that language is not reality.⁶ Heschel's phenomenological writing breaks down the conventional exclusion between images and concepts so as to achieve unmediated closeness to facts beyond language—be they material data or God's presence.⁷

Heschel is not a conventional philosopher. Overall, he develops a linear demonstration—proceeding from argument A to B to C and so forth—as a conceptual framework. Each chapter of *Man Is Not Alone* and *God in Search of Man* follows a step-by-step philosophical and theological design. But lacunae are more prominent than continuities. The author does not meticulously refute dissenting views; his judgments are abrupt and rarely sustained by references to intellectual history. These disruptions, however, have a positive function: to provoke insights, summarized by terse aphorisms, presumed to be self-evident.

Most prominent are the poetic and musical aspects of Heschel's style. Repetitions with variations permeate at all levels, from the far-reaching itinerary of entire books to chapters, titled sections, paragraphs, and well-wrought sentences. Chapter subsections function as miniature restatements of the broader arguments, sometimes forming prose poems that dramatize abstract ideas. This overdetermined style sustains rhythms that blend intense moments into a fuller harmony: "The art of the awareness of God, the art of sensing His presence in our daily lives cannot be learned off-hand. God's grace resounds like a staccato. Only by retaining the seemingly disconnected notes comes the ability to grasp the theme."⁸ A tone emerges which focuses even more sharply the religious perception.

The details of Heschel's style, as in poetic literature, reach into unusual corners of consciousness. Some of his more conspicuous tropes are: 1) antitheses that emphasize conceptual or ideological polarities; these opposites often appear as polemics or incomplete philosophical debates; 2) oxymoron, hyperbole, contrast, and chiasmus that highlight feelings or ideas; 3) "baroque" or elevated diction that calls attention to the literary, "poetic," or mystical dimension of this otherwise philosophical or theological discourse; 4) assertions without debate, or philosophical a priori; 5) vivid images, metaphors, and examples that point to ineffable reality; 6) aphorisms that strikingly condense insights.

Heschel's expositions, like musical scores, orchestrate moments of insight, attempting to arouse in readers decisive flashes of cognition. This deliberate training in religious thinking prepares a mental Copernican revolution—in which God becomes the Subject, and the reader an object of divine awareness. Heschel completes this conversion of consciousness in three early chapters of *Man Is Not Alone*, "The God of the Philosophers," "The Ultimate Question," and "In the Presence of God" (chaps. 7–9). We begin with chapter seven, a "prelude" that consolidates his polemic against dogma in favor of "the philosophy of concrete events, acts, insights, of that which is immediately given with the pious man."⁹

Phenomenological writing combines heterogeneous idioms to create a unity of effect. Chapter seven begins by stating the "theme," the methodological assumption of depth theology: "For religion is more than a creed or an ideology and cannot be understood when detached from actual living. It comes to light in moments in which one's soul is shaken with unmitigated concern about the meaning of all meaning, about one's ultimate commitment which is part of his very existence;"

(I interrupt these hard-hitting sentences that become increasingly metaphorical. Alliterations—"the soul is shaken with unmitigated concern"—makes the abstract possibility of "ultimate commitment" palpable. We continue.)

"in moments in which all foregone conclusions, all life-stifling trivialities are suspended; in which the soul is starved for an inkling of eternal reality; in moments of discerning the indestructibly sudden within the perishably constant."

After more repetitions of the "s" sound coupled with the alliterations of "discerning the indestructibly sudden," the paragraph ends with a chiasmus:

(+) (adv.) (–) (adj.)
indestructibly – sudden
perishably – constant
(–) (adv.) (+) (adj.)

that reinforces the combination of hyperbole ("the soul is starved") and understatement ("for an inkling of eternal reality"). These tropes call attention to the writing *qua* experience, inciting readers to respond, almost somatically, to the deadly hunger of an abstract faculty, "the soul."

The seventh chapter's final sentence advances the transition to intuitive certainty by diplomatically reiterating: "There is much we can

achieve in our quest for God by applying rational methods, provided we remember that, in matters that concern the totality of life, all higher attainments of our personality should be brought into play, particularly our sense of the ineffable."

The actual revolution begins in the next chapter, "The Ultimate Question" (chap. 8), and escalates Heschel's polemic against "speculative proofs" of God. Ultimate certainty cannot arise solely from the reflective process itself. So Heschel conducts this normally abstract procedure through images and examples that point beyond the known, to ineffable insights. He states, and repeats several times, that he is preparing readers to be "forced into faith . . . deprived of the power to disregard the unregarded."¹⁰

The problem: How do we know there is a God? Heschel repeatedly disparages rationalistic answers and endorses, through poetic and musical devices, the authoritative givens of insight. Each subtitled section of this chapter restates his phenomenological "argumentation" which collides with received ideas. The subtitle of the first section—"What Man Does With his Ultimate Wonder"—recapitulates once again the polemic against theories.¹¹

The opening paragraph typifies the polyphonic style which appeals, and sometimes in contradiction, to heterogeneous faculties of discernment. The first two sentences are short and declarative; both reject narrow reason: "The speculative proofs are the result of what man does with his reason. But speculation, as we know, is not our only source of certainty."¹² The next sentence, longer and more rhythmical, introduces images and emotion-laden adjectives reinforced by alliterations: "However precious the helping hand, the vital guidance and the sobering stress of reason, it does not ease the pensive burden which the world is forcing us to bear, the compulsion to care for things not convertible into mental effigies."

To characterize concepts or abstractions as "mental effigies" identifies them with blasphemous idols, prejudicing at least Jewish and Islamic iconoclasts against them. The rhyming terms—"forcing us to bear" and "the compulsion to care"—highlight the guiding postulate: "There is, indeed, another kind of evidence for what God is and means. It is the result of what man does with his ultimate wonder, with his sense of the ineffable."

Such assertions are already familiar in a sequential reading of *Man Is Not Alone*. The monotony of these repetitions should be mitigated by variations on the theme, to use a comparison that is both musical and poetic. The next paragraph imparts a conviction through an extended metaphor, which begins:

Mankind could never have brought forth the endless stream of its God-awareness out of the rock of finite facts by analyzing the design of its geological

layers. Indeed, when we go beyond analysis, trying to see the rock as a rock and to ponder on what it means *to be*, it turns away its face from our scrutines, and what remains is more unlikely, more unbelievable, than the mysterious ground of being.

These mineral images (reminiscent of Moses in the desert, Exod. 17:6) are followed by an epistemological generalization, the model of an insight: "Then it dawns upon us that the world of the known is a world unknown . . ." etc. Repeated antitheses urge us to reverse our usual (ego-centered) ways of thinking about reality.

The remainder of the chapter might be unbearable (and reading Heschel is to many readers) because of its unrestrained repetitions. But to a mind attuned to the musical iterations, variations, and tone of his style, vivid similes make his depth theology palpable: "By the time the question is placed before our critical eyes, it has withered like a leaf in the breath of an oven." "Torn out of its medium, it [the growing sense of the ineffable] is usually metamorphosed like a rose pressed between the pages of a book."

A longer sentence then prolongs the botanical metaphor, repeating the admonition to retain a total perspective when thinking about God: "If . . . we attempt to ponder about the ultimate question in its logical form, we should at least treat it like a plant which is uprooted from its soil, removed from its native winds, sunrays and terrestrial environment and can survive only if kept in conditions that somewhat resemble its original climate."¹³

The final paragraph of this section (entitled "The Ultimate Question") alludes to the theory of religious language that underlies Heschel's phenomenological method:¹⁴ "The issue at stake will be apprehended only by those who are able to find categories that mix with the unalloyed and to forge the imponderable into unique expression." Metaphor resolves the incompatibility between authoritative intuitions of the ineffable versus writing and thinking about the ineffable. The contradictory phrase "mix with the unalloyed" conjoins normally exclusive perspectives: the transcendent aspect of divine reality ("the unalloyed") to which Heschel constantly points, can be intuited by our finite senses.

Heschel elaborates his most logical sequence in the section entitled "Beyond Things."¹⁵ He systematically contrasts a (nontheistic) rational perspective with theocentric thinking. Without going into detail, here is how he demonstrates that "the reality of ineffable meaning is . . . beyond dispute." First, the presupposition: "the imperative of awe is its certificate of evidence, a universal certificate which we all witness and seal with tremor and spasm, *not* because we desire to, but because we are stunned and cannot brave it." Second, he seals that daring assertion with a lyrical outcry: "there is so much more meaning in reality than my soul can take in! . . . The perception of its surpassing my power of

perception is too consistent, staggering and universal to be illusory." And he concludes: "the ultimate question, therefore, is not the mind's *creatio ex nihilo* but a reiteration in the mind of what is given to the soul." Such is Heschel's self-validating intuition of divine reality: "The indication of what transcends all things is given to us with the same immediacy as the things themselves."

Heschel's critics correctly judge that such logical frameworks alone cannot convince the mind. And yet, he never professes philosophical neutrality; quite the contrary, he proclaims, from the outset, his axiomatic assumption: "let us remember the *fundamental fact* [my emphasis] of a universal nondiscursive perception of the ineffable which is a sense of transcendent meaning." He applies the orderly argument to frame the act of phenomenological intuition, performing spiritual insight that he then interprets.

Rehearsals for Revelation

Heschel's literary style strives to transform the obvious into an intimation of mystery, thus advancing his theocentric interpretation. His characteristic mixture of perspectives—logical sequences, lyrical assertions, contrasts underlined by various tropes, etc.—procedures of interruption and surprise—all override preestablished rational categories in favor of spiritual insight.

On the level of ideas, the final section of chapter eight, "A Spiritual Presence," rehearses the decisive chapter nine, "In The Presence of God." Heschel first consolidates his model of piety, of religious consciousness, already offered in several renditions: "Those to whom awareness of the ineffable is a constant state of mind know that the mystery is not an exception but an air that lies about all being, a spiritual setting of reality; not something apart but a *dimension* of all existence."¹⁶

He then renders this theocentric thinking almost tangible through tender human analogies: "There is a holiness that hovers over all things, that makes them look to us in some moments like objects of transcendent meditation, as if *to be meant to be thought of* [all Heschel's italics] by God, as if all external life were embraced by an inner life, by a process within a mind, pensive, intentional."

Heschel has applied the classic phenomenological idiom of intentionality to switch his focus from human to divine consciousness. Then he interrupts his assertion, the lyrical tone of which is sustained by the alliterative words "there is a holiness that hovers over all things"; after which, by literally opening a parenthesis, he reminds us of his critical self-awareness: "(Inner life, being thought of, is, of course, a simile, but

it is *only* in similes that we can communicate when speaking of the ultimate.)"¹⁷

After this metalinguistic intervention, theocentric thought remains the focus. Through another picturesque analogy, Heschel illustrates how our subjective awareness of "being"—and the mystery of our being—is actually "being thought of by God":

To the religious man it is as if things stood with *their back to him, their faces turned to God*, as if the ineffable quality of things consisted in their being an object of divine thought. Just as in touching a tree we know that the tree is not the end of the world, that the tree stands in space, so we know that the ineffable—what is holy in justice, compassion and truthfulness—is not the end of spirit.

Heschel almost renders concrete the "ineffable quality of things" with the anthropomorphic simile reinforced by italics. His analogy of "touching a tree" awakens memories of a universal experience of trees and initiates a series of lyrical assertions that rouse—if not our assent—at least our yearning to be closer to the divine mystery. The clause ends by evoking the emotion-laden ideals of "justice, compassion and truthfulness[,] the legitimacy of which no ethical thinker would willingly repudiate.

It would be too long, in a paper, to detail Heschel's variations on the theme of fellowship with God, so I simply quote chapter eight's two final sentences, which aphoristically summarize the preceding and anticipate the next chapter's framework: "We do not wonder *at* things any more; we wonder *with* all things [Heschel's italics]. We do not think about things; we think *for* all things." Again, antitheses and other stylistic parallels (the prepositions "at" versus "with"; "about" versus "for") anticipate the finale of spiritual communion.

The living God enters Heschel's narrative through the rich phenomenological writing of chapter nine, "In the Presence of God," which should "coerce" readers (as the author claims) into faith.¹⁸ The first paragraph maps the route: "How do we know that God is more than the holy dimension, more than an aspect or an attribute of being? How do we go from the allusiveness of the world—to a being to whom the world alludes?" The perfectly structured second paragraph ends by restating the author's agenda: "Long before we attain any knowledge about His *essence*, we possess an intuition of a divine *presence*."¹⁹ The rhymed, rhythmically similar, and italicized words highlight the breakthrough from impressions to knowledge.

The following two sections specify the theocentric content of insight. "The Dawn of Faith" develops a prose poem that reiterates the chapter's theme: "Who lit the wonder before our eyes and the wonder of our eyes?" And the following section—"What to Do with Wonder"—anticipates our response to the personal God: "Wonder is a state of being asked. The ineffable is a question addressed to us."

Philosophical critics vexed by the manner in which Heschel dismisses their approach find justification in this loading of the question: "All that is left to us is a choice—to answer or to refuse to answer. Yet the more we listen, the more we become stripped of the arrogance and callousness which alone would enable us to refuse." Simply discounting the inquiring or skeptical mind is a crude way to advance a convincing philosophical critique. From his phenomenological perspective, however, Heschel once again promotes intuition by polemically discrediting the mental faculties that inhibit it.

A dramatic analogy, not a logical deduction, clinches his endorsement of an epistemology of insight. Heschel's reasoning here is situational, not neutral: "At the moment in which a fire bursts forth, threatening to destroy one's home, a person does not pause to investigate whether the danger he faces is real or a figment of his imagination. Such a moment is not the time to inquire into the chemical principle of combustion."²⁰ Just as no decent human being would postpone a response to a life-threatening blaze by launching a meticulous scientific inquiry, so too: "The ultimate question, when bursting forth in our souls, is too startling, too heavily laden with unutterable wonder to be an academic question, to be equally suspended between yes and no. Such a moment is not the time to throw doubts upon the reason for the rise of the question." The moment must remain powerful.

Heschel's analogy, however, is ethical, not logical. The extended metaphor of radical amazement implies that undue critical questioning is comparable to dousing God's burning bush. The author assumes, or hopes, that readers will respond to the question of God with intellectual and spiritual valor. His refusal to engage doubts reminds readers, once again, that religious certainty is forced upon us from beyond neutral reason.

In fact, the next two sections insist upon the divine initiative, stressing that the mortal ego, by itself, cannot attain belief in God. Heschel answers in a variety of forms the question "Who is the Enigma?" and asserts: "At the moment in which we are stirred for the first time by the ultimate question we unreservedly confess our inability to face the world without a being which is beyond the world." He reverses normal sequential reasoning, by now assuming the manifest existence of God: "The problem is: How do we tell it to our minds? How do we overcome the antinomies that bar us from knowing clearly and distinctly what [God] means?"

Enforcing Ultimate Insight

Preparing his climax in the section entitled "The Invincible Question," Heschel establishes the metaphor of common mental categories as a

jail: "We would rather be prisoners, if only our mind, will, passion and ambitions were the four walls of the prison. There would, indeed, be no greater comfort than to live in the security of foregone conclusions, if not for that gnawing concern which turns all conclusions into a shambles."²¹ The remainder of the chapter builds up to an inescapable moment of insight, "a compulsion to be aware of the ineffable," a moment of "enforced concern."

The next section, "In Search of a Soul," forecasts an actual revelation, the divine will entering human consciousness. Heschel transforms a normally intransitive verb (shudder) into a metaphor for God's encounter with the person. One of the few blatant nongrammaticalities in his work—the expression "we are shuddered with radical amazement"—expresses through a somatic image the insight to which everything leads: "ultimate wonder is the state of knowledge in search of a mind; it is the thought of God in search of a soul."

After thus mapping out the conclusion, the section's two final paragraphs recapitulate Heschel's phenomenological strategy. He begins with a declaration, reinforced by tender imagery, followed by a repeated assertion, and, finally, a notice of what he expects readers to encounter at the journey's end: "It is a turning within the mind by a power from beyond the mind, a shock and collision with the unbelievable by which we are coerced into believing." The hallmarks of insight—shock, collision, being overcome—point to the divine source, "a turning within the mind by a power beyond the mind."

Heschel then repeats the same network of assertion and imagery, iterating the concept (or "theme") with musical variations. A characteristic paragraph adds a passage from the Jewish liturgy, the chanted *Kedusha*, a melodic affirmation of faith, followed by an interpretation, and ending with an aphoristic summary:

To be overtaken with awe of God is not to entertain a feeling but to share in a spirit that permeates all beings. "They all thank, they all praise, they all say: There is no one like God." As an act of personal recognition our praise would be fatuous, it is only meaningful as an act of joining in the endless song. We praise the pebbles on the road which are like petrified amazement, with all the flowers and trees which look as if hypnotized in silent devotion. When mind and soul agree, belief is born. But first our hearts must know the shudder of adoration.

The musical intensity increases. The lyrical section "Let Insight Be" expands, as it begins with the complex linguistic analogy of "the syntax of silence." Heschel repeats previous elements while insisting, now, upon the suddenness of the decisive cognition:

When the ultimate awareness comes, it is like a flash, arriving all at once. To meditative minds the ineffable is cryptic, inarticulate: dots, marks of secret meaning, scattered hints, to be gathered, deciphered and formed into evi-

dence; while in moments of insight the ineffable is a metaphor in a forgotten mother tongue.

Thus, awareness of God does not come by degrees: from timidity to intellectual temerity; from guesswork, reluctance, to certainty; it is not a decision reached at the crossroads of doubt. It comes when, drifting in the wilderness, having gone astray, we suddenly behold the immutable polar star. Out of endless anxiety, out of denial and despair, the soul bursts forth in speechless crying.

Heschel's invidious contrasts (e.g., "timidity" versus "temerity"; "guesswork" versus "certainty"; "doubt" versus "decision") end in commitment. The rhetorical symmetries meld the variations into a higher harmony, the tone of which borders on ecstasy. The culminating religious emotions of "endless anxiety" and "speechless crying" engrave into the reader's memory the previous "shudder of adoration," nurturing the desire for such a decisive insight.

Revelation and Commitment

Heschel depicts a divine revelation in the chapter's final section, "The Enforced Concern," confirming in the most dramatic, most determining way, the preceding rehearsals of insight. His phenomenological writing both performs and analyzes the event that begins in God and ends in the person's consciousness.²² The abstract becomes concrete through the extended metaphor, already sketched, of the rigidly conceptual mind as a prison: "The world in which we live is a vast cage within a maze, high as our mind, wide as our power of will, long as our life span." This image summarizes once and for all Heschel's polemics against conventional thought. He will then wrench the mind to the point of "ultimate not-knowing,"²³ yielding to the ineffable.

Readers can either reject Heschel's manipulation of images to arbitrate concepts, and stop reading—or welcome the cognitive authority of insight. The author assumes, of course, that readers are immersed in his poetic prose:

Others, however, who cannot stand it, despair. They have no power to spend on faith any more, no goal to strive for, no strength to seek a goal. But, then, a moment comes like a thunderbolt, in which a flash of the undisclosed rends our dark apathy asunder. It is full of overpowering brilliance, like a point in which all moments of life are focused or a thought which outweighs all thoughts ever conceived of.²⁴

Images of light and darkness, intensity, and suddenness all evoke the divine revelation (or mystical illumination—or phenomenological insight) which transforms the person's consciousness. Heschel brightens the metaphor accordingly: "There is so much light in our cage, in our world, it is as if it were suspended among the stars. Apathy turns to

splendor unawares. The ineffable has shuddered itself into our soul." Philosophy finally surrenders to revelation. Heschel thus brings readers to the threshold of revelation through images and analogies that overcome the alienation of concepts. An irrefutable moment of certainty—and commitment—has transpired.

It is God who, at the end of Heschel's itinerary, completes the argument.²⁵ His phenomenological writing makes tangible the transcendent, radically ineffable event (originating, as it does, from God). Heschel never claimed to elicit confidence in God through reason alone, nor primarily through critical analyses of competing conceptions. Nor did he expect his literary procedures as such to compel adhesion to the divine. The chapter's final paragraph revalidates the author's axiomatic assumption: "there is no man who is not shaken for an instant by the eternal." Whether or not our minds are convinced, he refines our craving for faith—or provokes more resolute resistance—or anguish at our inability to believe.²⁶

Heschel concludes his mimesis of divine revelation with a pragmatic assessment: "An inspiration passes, having been inspired never passes. It remains like an island across the restlessness of time, to which we move over the wake of undying wonder."²⁷ After phenomenological writing brings readers to the threshold of revelation, and God responds, philosophy of religion organizes moments of insight into a life pattern. Heschel trusts that readers will eventually emulate such piety—the "undying wonder" of radical amazement—pledging to God and to humankind a life both moral and holy.

BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY

NOTES

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1. The present study was inspired in large part by the challenge of Neil Gillman's critical assessment, "Epistemological Tensions in Heschel's Thought," in the special Heschel issue of *Conservative Judaism*, Vol. 5, Nos. 2-3 (Winter-Spring 1998), pp. 77-83, esp. p. 79; Gillman writes of his two "moods": the *Seuda Shlishit* mood which reading Heschel inspires and the objective philosophical attitude which judges Heschel's philosophical assertions to be often unconvincing, unfounded, or inadequately elaborated. See also William Kaufman's cogent critique of Heschel in his book, *Contemporary Jewish Philosophies* (orig. 1976 Reconstructionist Press and Behrman House; repr. Detroit, 1992).

Fritz A. Rothschild was the first to define Heschel's philosophical system in the analytical preface to his anthology, *Between God and Man* (New York,

1959) and several subsequent studies; that book and John Merkle, *The Genesis of Faith*. A. J. Heschel's *Depth Theology* (New York, 1985) leave no doubt that Heschel deserves full status as a philosopher of religious consciousness and cognition. See below notes 2–3.

2. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man. A Philosophy of Judaism* (New York, 1955), p. 148; see esp. chaps. 1, Self-Understanding of Judaism; 11, An Ontological Presupposition. Heschel carefully documents the primacy of insight or intuition in chap. 14, "Insight," pp. 145–151; also chap. 19: "Souls are not introduced to a range of mountains through the courtesy of a definition. Our goal, then, must not be to find a definition, but to learn how to sense, how to intuit the will of God in the words. The essence of intuition is not in grasping what is describable but in sensing what is ineffable. The goal is to train the reason for the appreciation of that which lies beyond reason. It is only through our sense of the ineffable that we may intuit the mystery of revelation" (p. 189).

See also Heschel, *Man is Not Alone. A Philosophy of Religion* (Philadelphia, 1951), esp. chaps. 2, Radical Amazement; 3, The World is An Allusion; 7, The God of the Philosophers. Heschel's most concise summary of his philosophy is *Who is Man?* (Stanford University Press, 1965) and "Depth Theology," *The Insecurity of Freedom* (New York, 1966), pp. 115–126; orig. pub., *Cross Currents*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (Fall 1960), pp. 317–325.

3. The present analysis of Heschel's rhetoric of revelation extends two important studies: 1) Lawrence Perlman, *Abraham Heschel's Idea of Revelation* (Atlanta, 1989) which conclusively demonstrates how Heschel validates divine inspiration in terms of Edmund Husserl's model of phenomenological intuition. Perlman elaborates the basic phenomenological principle of the "noetico-noematic correlation" in Husserl's analysis of cognitive intuition and insight—a confluence of the objective out-there (ideal entities that are the noemata) and the temporal psychological event. 2) Natalie Depraz, *Écrire en phénoménologie. "Une autre époque de l'écriture"* (Paris, 1999), whose analysis of "phenomenological writing" emerges from her study of Husserl's preparatory notebooks. For the creation of a philosophical discourse which, itself, is a locus of de-conceptualization of philosophy, see p. 116. Another important work has recently appeared in Hebrew: Alexander Even-Chen, *Voice Out of the Darkness. Abraham Joshua Heschel. Phenomenology and Mysticism* (Tel Aviv, 1999).

4. "The intuition of God is universal, yet there is hardly a universal form—with few possible exceptions—to express it," Heschel, *Not Alone*, p. 98. Heschel assumes that the living God, even after the Hebrew prophets, still conveys the divine will to individuals. See Heschel, *Prophetic Inspiration After the Prophets. Maimonides and Other Medieval Authorities* (Hoboken, 1996). The book consists of richly documented articles originally published in Hebrew in 1945 and 1950 which demonstrate, I contend, that Heschel not only believed that divine revelation is continuous but that his expositions depend upon God to complete the epistemological trajectory: see Edward Kaplan, *Holiness in Words, A. J. Heschel's Poetics of Piety* (Albany, 1996), chap. 9, "Metaphor and Miracle"; orig. pub. *Conservative Judaism* Vol. 46, Nos. 2–3 (Winter 1994), pp. 3–18.

5. See Depraz, *Écrire en phénoménologie*, chap. V, "Qu'est-ce qu'une 'méta-

phore philosophique?'—De l'abandon de l'opposition entre concept et image," 111–132. Also: "épouser au plus près l'expérience, capter son cours sinueux, produire une discursivité qui se situe à même les choses, tout cela exige un effort maximal que l'on peut dire "mimétique", sinon pour faire coïncider, du moins pour allier l'écriture et les choses. En usant d'expressions figurées, littéralement, de 'figures' ou de 'tropes', ou bien en pliant la syntaxe à l'exigence du réel mouvant et temporalisé, on tâche d'ajouter le plus possible l'idéal à celui-ci : ce faisant, on n'est pas loin, *grosso modo*, d'une forme moderne de cratylisme ; partant en revanche du principe selon lequel le langage n'est pas la réalité des choses mais déploie sa symbolique propre, ou encore conserve son autonomie, on pratique une écriture critique, où l'argumentation tient lieu de symbolicité" (p. 115).

6. See Depraz, *Écrire en phénoménologie*, chap. IV, "Le risque poétique de la phénoménologie et l'empreinte phénoménologique de la poésie," pp. 87–109. "La formalisation de ce travail est cependant tout autre en poésie et en phénoménologie. Celle-ci déploie une analytique nourrie par des distinctions et des médiations qui seules permettent de reconstituer le cheminement requis en vue d'une compréhension effective de cet immédiat apparaissant. Au contraire, la poésie inscrit d'emblée son effort spécifique pour saisir l'émergence native du sens à même le sensible dans le cadre du travail formel sur l'écriture et le mode de l'expression" (pp. 91–92). See also p. 103 on Francis Ponge.

7. Whereas Husserl's free flowing "literary" discourse in his notebooks gives way to the philosopher's relatively objective, sober argumentation, Heschel favors East European Jewish fervor over the "strict logical arrangement" of Sephardic books: "Ashkenazic writers forego clarity for the sake of depth. The contours of their thoughts are irregular, vague, and often perplexingly entangled; their content is restless, animated by an inner wrestling and a kind of baroque emotion. . . . A spasm of feeling, a passionate movement of thought, an explosive enthusiasm, will break through the form," Heschel, *The Earth is the Lord's* (New York, 1950), pp. 30–31; orig. published as "The Two Great Traditions, The Sephardim and the Ashkenazim," *Commentary* Vol. 5, No. 5 (May 1948), pp. 416–422.

8. Heschel, *Not Alone*, p. 88.

9. This and the following quotations are from Heschel, *Not Alone*, pp. 55–56.

10. *Ibid.*, chap. 8, p. 62. In the decisive chapter 9, Heschel insists that the initiative comes from God: "It is a turning within the mind, by a power from beyond the mind, a shock and collision with the unbelievable by which we are coerced into believing" (p. 73). Toward the end of that chapter, the narrative performs an insight that claims that it is God Who has overwhelmed the human will. See below.

11. An informed reader recognizes the allusion to Paul Tillich's ontological category of "ultimate concern" (and elsewhere God as the intangible "ultimate ground of being")—and may appreciate Heschel's defense of a personal God.

12. This and the following quotations from Heschel, *Not Alone*, pp. 67–68.

13. All quotations in this paragraph from *ibid.*, p. 60.

14. See Kaplan, "Language and Reality," in *Holiness in Words*, pp. 45–59.

15. Heschel, *Not Alone*, pp. 62–63. To substantiate more fully the lacunae

in Heschel's argumentation, it would be useful here to consult the essays of William Kaufman and Neil Gillman; see above note 1.

16. Heschel, *Not Alone*, p. 64.

17. This and the following quotations from *ibid.*, pp. 64–65.

18. See *ibid.*, chap. 8, p. 73.

19. This and the following quotations from *ibid.*, pp. 67–71.

20. This and the following quotation from *ibid.*, p. 69.

21. The following quotations are from *ibid.*, pp. 71–75.

22. I have analyzed this passage in more detail in Kaplan, "Mysticism and Despair, The Threshold of Revelation," in *Holiness in Words*, pp. 65–70; orig. pub. "Mysticism and Despair in A. J. Heschel's Religious Thought," *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 57 (January 1977), pp. 33–47. See Heschel, *In Search*, pp. 209–217, for Heschel's crucial distinction between process and event.

23. The term is taken from an analogous passage in Heschel, *In Search*: "Only those who have gone through days on which words were of no avail, on which the most brilliant theories jarred the ear like mere slang; only those who have experienced ultimate not-knowing, the voicelessness of a soul struck by wonder, total muteness, are able to enter the meaning of God, a meaning greater than the mind. . . . We must first peer into the darkness, feel strangled and entombed in the hopelessness of living without God, before we are ready to feel the presence of His living light" (p. 140). See Kaplan, "Metaphor and Miracle. Modern Judaism and the Holy Spirit," in *Holiness in Words*, esp. pp. 142–145.

24. This and the following quotations from Heschel, *Not Alone*, pp. 77–78.

25. Heschel's phenomenological writing translates the ineffable revelation with an analogy followed by its theological conceptualization: "It has entered our consciousness like a ray of light passing into a lake. Refraction of that penetrating ray brings about a turning in our mind: We are penetrated by His [God's] insight." Readers now think theocentrically, with God as the Subject. Intense, dramatic imagery in the next paragraph repeats the experience (the chronological sequence is beside the point), as it begins: "A tremor seizes our limbs, our nerves are struck, quiver like strings; our whole being bursts into shudders" (Heschel, *Not Alone*, p. 78).

26. At the very least, Heschel bears vibrant witness that our lips can "touch the veil of the Holy of Holies." Heschel, "Faith" (part 2), *The Reconstructionist* Vol. 10, No. 4 (17 November 1944), p. 16; repr. in Heschel, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, ed. Susannah Heschel (New York, 1996), p. 339.

27. Heschel, *Not Alone*, p. 78.